

Granite State Home and Garden
Immediate Release

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Eating Locally: Back to Our Roots

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Many New Hampshire consumers are trying to consume more local food and there are many benefits to spending our food dollars on locally produced items. Supporting local farmers keeps those dollars in the community. Local food is unsurpassed for freshness. But perhaps, less obvious are the significant environmental benefits of a regionally-based food system.

Reducing the distance that food is transported and the necessary refrigeration requirements can reduce our total energy use and its pollutant effects. The luxury of food shipped to us from across the country or around the world may not be sustainable into the future.

If we look back at how people in New England ate just a generation or two ago, we find the typical diet was very different than that of today. In the past, when fresh greens, strawberries, tomatoes, and peppers weren't available from gardens, people relied on the many other crops that grow well in our climate and can be stored for later consumption.

Good long-keeping vegetables like potatoes and winter squash, and fruit like apples and pears helped sustain New Englanders through a long winter. Root crops like beets, carrots, turnips and onions that keep well in a cool area provided important vitamins and minerals to the diet. Dried and canned goods provided nearly the rest of the plant-based diet.

Dried beans were a regular crop on most farms, providing a high protein, high fiber staple for the classic baked bean dishes and for soups and stews. Canning of other summer fruits and vegetables that could not be stored fresh, was a ritual of late summer in every rural and many city homes before the era of refrigeration.

In the decades between the two world wars, refrigeration became widely available and brought great changes in Americans' eating habits. Later, in the 50's and 60's, the development of the interstate highway system and efficient air transportation, led to the availability of virtually any fruit or vegetable in supermarkets at almost any time of the year.

In order to eat locally and indigenously, we need to re-adjust our diets to be more in tune with the seasons. Eating what is available fresh, storing the things that keep well, especially without refrigeration, and canning or freezing the rest, are all things we can do to eat an indigenous diet that supports local economies and minimizes our energy impacts.

For more information on this topic and others, contact Richard Uncles, Division of Regulatory Services, NH Dept. of Agriculture, and Markets & Food at tel. 271-3685, email: runcles@agr.state.nh.us or visit the website at www.agriculture.nh.gov.